United Nations CEDAW/C/SLE/CO/6

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Sierra Leone*

1. The Committee considered the sixth periodic report of Sierra Leone (CEDAW/C/SLE/6) at its 1199th and 1200th meetings, on 19 February 2014 (see CEDAW/C/SR.1199 and 1200). The Committee's list of issues and questions is contained in CEDAW/C/SLE/Q/6 and the responses of the Government of Sierra Leone are contained in CEDAW/C/SLE/Q/6/Add.1.

A. Introduction

2. The Committee appreciates that the State party submitted its sixth periodic report. It also appreciates the State party's written replies to the list of issues and questions raised by its pre-sessional working group. It welcomes the oral presentation of the delegation and the further clarifications provided in response to the questions posed orally by the Committee during the dialogue.

3. The Committee commends the State party for its high-level delegation, which was headed by the Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, Alhaji Moijue E. Kaikai. The delegation also included the Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, and representatives of the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, as well as the Executive Office and Parliament. The Committee appreciates the constructive dialogue that took place between the delegation and the Committee.

B. Positive aspects

4. The Committee welcomes the progress achieved since the consideration in 2007 of the State party's fifth periodic report (CEDAW/C/SLE/5) in undertaking legislative reforms, in particular the adoption of:

* Adopted by the Committee at its fifty-seventh session (10-28 February 2014).

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(a) The Sexual Offences Act, in 2012, which increased criminal penalties for sexual offences, including sex trafficking;

(b) The Legal Aid Act, in 2012, which aims at providing free legal aid to, among others, women victims of sexual violence;

(c) The Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act, the Domestic Violence Act and the Devolution of Estates Act, aiming at harmonizing national legislation with the Convention's provisions, each in 2007;

(d) The Child Rights Act, in 200[illegible], which elevated the minimum age of marriage to 18 years for women and men.

5. The Committee welcomes the State party's efforts to improve its institutional and policy framework aimed at accelerating the elimination of discrimination against women and promoting gender equality, through the adoption of:

(a) The Agenda for Prosperity (2013-2018);

(b) The Anti-Trafficking [illegible] Committee on Migrant Workers, in 2013;

(c) The National Strategy for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy, in 2013;

(d) Special Saturday courts, in 2012, mandated to try sexual violence cases and secure more privacy for victims and expedite trials;

(e) The National Health Strategic Plan (2010-2015);

(f) The National Action Plan on Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) on women, peace and security;

(g) The National Referral Protocol on gender-based violence and the National Plan of Action on gender-based violence, in 2012, and the National Committee on gender-based violence, in 2007.

6. The Committee welcomes the fact that, in the period since the consideration of the previous report, the State party ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in 2010.

C. Principal areas of concern and recommendations

Parliament

7. **The Committee stresses the crucial role of the legislative power in ensuring the full implementation of the Convention (see the statement by the Committee on its relationship with parliamentarians, adopted at the forty-fifth session, in 2010). It invites Parliament, in line with its mandate, to take the necessary steps regarding the implementation of the present concluding observations between now and the next reporting period under the Convention.**

Legal status of the Convention and definition of discrimination against women

8. The Committee is concerned that, despite its ratification by the State party in 1988, the Convention has yet to be incorporated into the Sierra Leonean domestic legal system and is therefore not directly applicable in the courts. The Committee also expresses concern that the definition of discrimination in the State party's Constitution is not in line with article 1 of the Convention, which covers both direct

and indirect discrimination, nor is there any legislation enshrining the principle of equality between women and men. The Committee is also concerned that the ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa is still pending.

9. **The Committee urges the State party to take immediate steps to ensure the incorporation of the Convention into its domestic legal system in order to make its provisions directly applicable. It calls upon the State party, as a matter of priority, to incorporate into appropriate national legislation a definition of discrimination against women in conformity with article 1 of the Convention. The Committee further calls upon the State party to incorporate the principle of equality between women and men in line with article 2 of the Convention into the Constitution, which is currently being reviewed. Furthermore, the Committee urges the State party to honour its commitment to swiftly enacting the gender equality and women's empowerment bill. Lastly, it recommends that the State party expedite its efforts to ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.**

Constitutional and legislative framework, harmonization of laws, and discriminatory laws

10. The Committee notes the efforts to review the Constitution and national laws to identify provisions that discriminate against women. The Committee, however, is concerned at the very slow pace of the constitutional review that has been ongoing since the last constructive dialogue, in 2007. The Committee is particularly concerned that the highly debated section 27 (d) (4) of the Constitution, which provides that the prohibition of discrimination does not apply to adoption, marriage, divorce, burial, devolution of property on death and to other matters of personal law, not only discriminates against women, but also prevails over the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act, the Domestic Violence Act and the Devolution of Estates Act, thus defeating the efforts of the State party to comply with the Convention. It is also concerned that other statutory and customary norms that discriminate against women remain in force, in particular those contained in:

(a) Section 8 (1) (b) of the Chieftaincy Act, which permits disqualification of women as candidates for chieftaincy election based on tradition;

(b) The Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Act No. 12 of 1972, which provides for different minimum ages for men and women to qualify as jurors;

(c) Customary law pertaining to marriage consent and women's right to inheritance.

11. **The Committee welcomes the commitment of the State party to finalizing the constitutional review and holding a referendum by March 2015. In this regard, it calls upon the State party:**

(a) **To ensure that the constitutional review is finalized within the given time frame and that section 27 (d) (4) is accordingly repealed, inter alia, through raising the awareness of all relevant stakeholders, including local chiefs and community leaders, regarding the importance of incorporating the prohibition of sex-based discrimination and gender equality provisions in legal texts;**

(b) To take a holistic approach to law reform that will ensure women's de jure and de facto equality within the framework of the ongoing legislative and constitutional review processes;

(c) To undertake intensive awareness-raising campaigns so as to ensure that section 27 (d) (4) of the Constitution, as well as all discriminatory laws, including customary law, are amended or repealed and brought into full compliance with the Convention and the Committee's general recommendations, as a matter of priority.

Access to justice

12. The Committee notes the measures adopted during the period under review to reform the justice system and further facilitate women's access to justice, including through the adoption of the new Justice Sector Reform Strategy and Investment Plan (2011-2014), and the Legal Aid Act in 2012, and the 2011 Local Courts Act. It is, however, concerned that, despite those measures, women's access to justice remains limited. The Committee is particularly concerned about the lack of independence of the judiciary, inadequate court infrastructure, the lengthy trials and delays in particular in cases of sexual violence, capacity constraints and lack of due process guarantees, and the insufficient capacity-building on existing legislative frameworks for judges, prosecutors, lawyers and relevant law enforcement agents. The Committee is further concerned that many recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have not yet been implemented, and that reparation for victims of the civil war, including women victims of sexual violence have thus far been inadequate.

13. **The Committee requests the State party:**

(a) To remove all barriers that women may face in access to justice. To this end, the State party should ensure the effective implementation of adequately resourced measures aimed at justice reforms and take other steps to enhance women's legal literacy and awareness of their rights, including their right to seek legal redress in court;

(b) To ensure that the Convention and related national legislation are made an integral part of legal education and the capacity-building programmes for judges, lawyers, prosecutors, law enforcement officers, district officials, chiefs and other traditional and community leaders so as to create a legal culture supportive of women's equality and non-discrimination;

(c) To disseminate the Convention widely to the general public so as to create awareness of women's human rights and to raise awareness among legislators and the general public of the urgent need to prioritize legal reforms to achieve de jure and substantive equality for women;

(d) To allocate sufficient resources to implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations in relation to women and girls who are war victims in order to ensure their full rehabilitation, reintegration into society and compensation through the reparation programme.

National machinery for the advancement of women

14. The Committee appreciates the information on the appointment of the Gender Adviser at the President's Office in 2011. However, it reiterates its previous concern regarding the weak institutional capacity of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and the national machinery for the advancement of women. While taking note of the information provided during the dialogue that the budgets of all ministries were gender mainstreamed, the Committee is concerned that the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs is chronically underfunded and understaffed and has no authority or capacity to work effectively towards the full implementation of the Convention at the national, provincial and local levels. The Committee further regrets the lack of detailed information on the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Policy on the Advancement of Women and the National Policy on Gender Mainstreaming.

15. **The Committee calls upon the State party:**

(a) **To expedite the current recruitment process of staff for the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, and in particular the Gender Affairs Directorate of the Ministry;**

(b) **To allocate sufficient human, technical and financial resources to the Ministry to enable it to discharge its coordinating role effectively, including at the provincial and local levels;**

(c) **To accelerate the finalization of the National Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment policy and ensure that it is sufficiently funded and effectively implemented. It should contain clear goals, benchmarks and timetables, as well as mechanisms for regular and systematic monitoring and evaluation of progress in its implementation, including indicators.**

Temporary special measures

16. The Committee notes the absence of temporary special measures, except at the local government level, to accelerate the achievement of substantive equality between men and women in all areas under the Convention. It also recalls that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendation to ensure a 30 per cent quota for women in elected and appointed political posts has not yet been implemented.

17. **Recalling its general recommendation No. 25 on temporary special measures, and its previous recommendations (CEDAW/C/SLE/CO/5, para. 19), the Committee urges the State party to accelerate the adoption of the gender equality and women's empowerment bill and its draft policy providing a legislative basis for the adoption of temporary special measures and to make use of such measures in all areas covered by the Convention where women are underrepresented or disadvantaged, including in public and political life, and to improve the situation of rural women.**

Stereotypes and harmful practices

18. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) The lack of information on steps taken to address adverse traditional stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in society

and, in particular, in the family, and the persistence of patriarchal norms that reinforce male dominance, especially among rural communities;

(b) The continued prevalence of female genital mutilation and the lack of legal prohibition of this harmful practice and the rejection of a provision criminalizing child female genital mutilation during the adoption of the Child Rights Act, despite the memorandum of understanding signed between the "Soweis", local chiefs and civil society organizations on the banning of child female genital mutilation throughout the country;

(c) The existence of a legal provision in the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act that allows child marriage subject to parental consent.

19. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Develop a comprehensive strategy to eliminate stereotypes that discriminate against women, including by conducting awareness-raising efforts targeting the general public and the media, in line with the Committee's previous recommendation (CEDAW/C/SLE/CO/5, para. 21);**

(b) **Undertake a review of school textbooks to eliminate gender-based stereotypes;**

(c) **Explicitly prohibit female genital mutilation and other harmful practices. To this end, it should intensify its efforts in holding consultations with civil society and women's organizations and traditional leaders, at the provincial and local levels, with a view to fostering a dialogue on eliminating female genital mutilation and other harmful practices, and changing stereotypes, discriminatory attitudes and practices;**

(d) **Harmonize the minimum age of marriage at 18 years, and ensure its strict implementation.**

Violence against women

20. The Committee notes the State party's efforts to combat violence against women, in particular the adoption of the Domestic Violence Act in 2007 and of the Sexual Offences Act in 2012, and institutional measures to identify and rehabilitate victims of gender-based violence. However, the Committee is concerned about:

(a) The continued high rates of domestic and sexual violence against women;

(b) The weak implementation of the above-mentioned laws, which is undermined by the discriminatory provision in section 27 (4) (d) of the Constitution, and the limited resources allocated to the implementation of these laws;

(c) The extremely low conviction rate in sexual and domestic violence cases, lengthy trials and the exertion of pressure on women victims of violence to settle cases out of court, resulting in impunity for perpetrators of gender-based violence.

21. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ensure the effective implementation of the Domestic Violence Act (2007) and the Sexual Offences Act (2012), including by reviewing the discriminatory provisions in section 27 (4) (d) of the Constitution to bring it in**

line with the above laws and increasing the human and financial resources of the judicial system;

(b) Establish a mechanism to monitor the progress in the implementation of the National Plan of Action on gender-based violence;

(c) Provide systematic and mandatory capacity-building programmes for judges, prosecutors, lawyers, police officers and health-care providers, to ensure that victims of violence are dealt with in a gender-sensitive manner;

(d) Raise awareness of the existence of new legal provisions prohibiting marital rape and incest, encourage women to report domestic and sexual violence, and ensure that they are duly informed about available legal remedies;

(e) Ensure that all reports of domestic and sexual violence are effectively investigated and that perpetrators are effectively prosecuted and punished. In this regard, the State party should expedite the enactment of the criminal procedure bill with a view to expediting criminal proceedings in cases of gender-based violence;

(f) Provide adequate assistance and protection to women victims of violence, in particular by increasing the number, capacity and funding of shelter facilities.

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

22. The Committee notes the State party's efforts to increase sanctions for trafficking offences through the Child Rights and Sexual Offences Acts. However, it notes with concern that the State party remains a source, transit and destination country for women and children trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labour. It is also concerned about the reported high incidence of internal trafficking of women and girls from rural areas. Furthermore, the Committee is concerned about the limited prosecution and conviction rates under the Anti-Human Trafficking Act (2005) and the absence of a specific action plan to implement the Act. Lastly, the Committee is concerned about the lack of information on prostitution that is prevalent in the State party due mainly to poverty.

23. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) Ensure the effective implementation and full enforcement of the 2005 Anti-Human Trafficking Act, the 2007 Child Rights Act and the 2012 Sexual Offences Act, including by effectively prosecuting and punishing traffickers;

(b) Increase the provision of assistance and support to women victims of trafficking, as well as prevention efforts, by addressing the root causes of trafficking and improving the economic situation of women in order to eliminate their vulnerability to exploitation and traffickers;

(c) Adopt a specific action plan for the implementation of the Anti-Human Trafficking Act;

(d) Collect statistical data on the extent and magnitude of prostitution and undertake a study to assess the root causes of this phenomenon, and ensure access to health-care facilities to women in prostitution, and a safe exit strategy for those who wish to leave;

(e) Expedite its efforts to ratify the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Participation in political and public life

24. While welcoming the adoption of the National Action Plan for the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008), the Committee regrets the lack of information about the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Action Plan and about reports that it is reliant on donors. The Committee is also concerned about the low participation of women in decision-making and the lack of measures to address the underlying causes, including prevailing social and cultural attitudes. It is also concerned about the absence of an overall quota system that aims at accelerating women's participation in political life, including in decision-making at all levels. The Committee further notes with concern that under the Chieftaincy Act women may be precluded from standing for election in chieftaincy elections based on tradition.

25. **The Committee calls upon the State party:**

(a) To ensure full implementation of the National Action Plan on Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008), including by providing it with adequate resources;

(b) To expeditiously adopt the draft law on gender equality and women's empowerment establishing a quota of 30 per cent for women's representation in elected and appointed political positions, and in all levels of the judiciary; and ensure that the constitutional review recommendations, inter alia, repeal the provision in the Chieftaincy Act that restricts women's participation in chieftaincy elections;

(c) To launch awareness-raising campaigns to highlight the importance of women's full and equal participation in leadership positions at all levels of society as a whole.

Nationality

26. The Committee notes with concern that women who give birth outside the country cannot transmit their Sierra Leonean nationality to their children, in violation of article 9 (2) of the Convention, should they have acquired another nationality. It also notes with concern that section 7 of the Citizenship Act (as amended in 2006) is facially discriminatory as it refers only to non-Sierra Leonean women married to Sierra Leonean male citizens for the purpose of naturalization, and not to non-Sierra Leonean men married to Sierra Leonean female citizens.

27. **The Committee urges the State party to ensure the equal rights of women and men to acquire, transfer, change or retain their nationality, and to transmit it to their children born abroad. The Committee urges the State party to amend the Citizenship Act in order to bring it into full compliance with article 9 of the Convention. It further recommends that the State party consider acceding to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.**

Education

28. The Committee expresses its concern about:

(a) Girls' lower performance at the primary level of education, despite the increased enrolment and completion rates of girls at that level;

(b) The low enrolment and completion rates of girls at the secondary and tertiary levels of education;

(c) The geographical disparities in access to education;

(d) The increase in sexual abuse and harassment of girls in schools and the increase in teenage pregnancies, despite the development of a code of ethics for teachers, and the negative impact of harmful traditional practices such as early and forced marriages on girls' education, and barriers impeding pregnant girls' and young mothers' access to education;

(e) The continued practice of corporal punishment in schools.

29. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Improve the educational infrastructure, especially in rural areas, and raise awareness of the importance of education as a human right and a basis for the empowerment of women;**

(b) **Ensure equal access for women and girls to all levels of education and retain more girls in school, and intensify its efforts to reduce geographical disparities in access to education;**

(c) **Ensure that sexual abuse and harassment in school are adequately addressed and punished, and effectively implement the National Strategy for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy (2013) and the Code of Ethics for Teachers, and remove all barriers to school attendance by pregnant girls and young mothers;**

(d) **Integrate age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights into school curricula, including comprehensive sex education for adolescent girls and boys covering responsible sexual behaviour and the prevention of early pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS;**

(e) **Explicitly prohibit corporal punishment in all settings.**

Employment

30. The Committee is concerned about:

(a) The low number of women employed in the public sector and the lack of information on women's employment in the private sector;

(b) The concentration of women in the informal labour market (84 per cent in rural areas and 63 per cent in urban areas) without social and legal protection and the absence of measures to facilitate their integration into the formal labour market;

(c) The absence of information on the extent of the gender pay gap, on how the principle of equal pay for work of equal value is being implemented and on job

evaluation and other methods to ensure transparency in recruitment practices in the private and public service;

(d) Occupational segregation and concentration of women in traditionally female-dominated occupations;

(e) The lack of measures to address the situation of women working in exploitative conditions, such as in mining, domestic work and agriculture;

(f) Delays in adopting the employment bill.

31. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Collect sex-disaggregated data on the situation of women in the private sector and the informal sector in line with its previous recommendation (CEDAW/C/SLE/CO/5, para. 33), and take effective measures to monitor and improve the working conditions of women in those sectors by removing the obstacles that women face in entering the labour force;**

(b) **Take action to address the wage gap between men and women and occupational segregation, and intensify technical and vocational training for women in traditionally male-dominated fields;**

(c) **Establish an effective monitoring and regulatory mechanism on employment and recruitment practices in the public sector;**

(d) **Regulate and monitor the working conditions of girls and women employed in mining, domestic work or agriculture, in order to protect them from exploitative labour, through increased inspections and fines for employers;**

(e) **Expedite the adoption of the employment bill while ensuring the incorporation of the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value.**

Health

32. The Committee welcomes the measures to facilitate and reduce regional disparities in women's access to health care, including through the adoption of the National Strategic Health Plan (2010-2015) and the Initiative for Free Health Care for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children below the age of 5 (2010). The Committee, however, notes with concern:

(a) The very high maternal mortality ratio in the State party;

(b) The low contraceptive use (12.1 per cent) and limited access to modern contraceptives and information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including the right of women to autonomous decision-making about their health;

(c) Regional and socioeconomic disparities in women's and girl's access to sexual and reproductive health services, including skilled birth attendance and adequate antenatal and postnatal care, affecting mainly rural women, women in Northern Province, poor women and women with low levels of education;

(d) The fact that the law on abortion criminalizes the procedure without providing any exception, the high incidence of sexual violence and unwanted pregnancies resulting in unsafe abortions, which account for 13 per cent of maternal

mortality, and delays in adopting the abortion bill, which decriminalizes the termination of pregnancy based on various socioeconomic grounds;

(e) The high incidence of vesico-vaginal fistula, including among adolescents;

(f) The lack of information on the mental health status of women in the State party.

33. **The Committee urges the State party to ensure the effective implementation of all measures aimed at facilitating women's affordable access to health care, including through the allocation of sufficient resources and the implementation of the Initiative for Free Health Care throughout the State party. The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Strengthen its efforts to reduce maternal mortality, address its causes and increase the number of skilled health-care personnel, in particular in rural areas;**

(b) **Provide effective access for women and girls to comprehensive information regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights, including on contraceptive use in order to reduce the rate of unwanted pregnancies, teenage pregnancies and unsafe abortions, and ensure that modern contraceptives are available and affordable for all women;**

(c) **Enhance women's access to health-care facilities and skilled birth attendance, postnatal and maternal care, especially in rural areas and in Northern Province;**

(d) **Accelerate the adoption of the abortion bill;**

(e) **Examine the link, if any, between female genital mutilation and the prevalence of vesico-vaginal fistula, in line with its previous recommendation (CEDAW/C/SLE/CO/5, para. 23), and study the causes of vesico-vaginal fistula and set targets and benchmarks with a concrete time frame for its reduction. It also recommends the continuous provision of medical and psychological assistance to women and girls affected by vesico-vaginal fistula, including through the effective implementation of the National Strategy on Fistula (2013);**

(f) **Collect disaggregated data on the situation of women's mental health, take effective measures to address the impact of the civil war on women's mental health and include information on the progress made in adopting the mental health bill in its next periodic report.**

Rural women

34. The Committee reiterates its concern (CEDAW/C/SLE/CO/5, para. 36) about the precarious situation of women in rural areas, who are disproportionately affected by poverty and limited access to justice, education, economic opportunities, health care and credit and loans. The Committee is also concerned about the prevalence of harmful practices such as early marriages in rural areas and about the persistence of traditional customs limiting women's access to land and inheritance. It is further concerned about delays in adopting the land policy and the lack of measures to address rural women's vulnerability to land acquisition by multinational mining companies, often resulting in forced evictions, displacement of women and lack of adequate compensation.

35. **The Committee calls upon the State party:**

(a) **To eliminate harmful practices and discrimination against rural women and address customs and traditions that justify and perpetuate them;**

(b) **To pay special attention to the needs of rural women and ensure that they participate in decision-making processes at the community level and in development planning, and that they have equal access to basic services and infrastructures and economic opportunities, including income-generating projects and credit facilities;**

(c) **To ensure that all discriminatory customary law is repealed or amended and brought into full compliance with the Convention and the Committee's general recommendations, in particular regarding land ownership and women's right to inheritance;**

(d) **To take special measures to enhance rural women's knowledge and awareness of their rights, including their right to seek legal redress in statutory courts;**

(e) **To expedite its efforts to adopt the land policy and address the adverse effects of land acquisitions and long-term leases on rural women, and ensure that women are involved in the negotiations of land lease agreements and that their livelihoods are not negatively affected by such agreements.**

Disadvantaged groups of women

Widows, former women war combatants and women war victims

36. The Committee notes with concern the lack of data on widows and their living conditions and on the situation of former women combatants in the State party. It is also concerned at restrictions on widows' right to inheritance and that in practice their and their children's possessions are taken by the family of the deceased husband. The Committee is further concerned that the compensation of war widows and women victims of conflict-related sexual violence continues to be delayed for lack of funds.

37. **The Committee urges the State party:**

(a) **To collect disaggregated data on the situation of widows and former women combatants and include such information in its next periodic report;**

(b) **To ensure that widows can enjoy their rights to property and to inheritance without restrictions, including by implementing the Devolution of Estates Act No. 21 and adopting measures to modify social and cultural patterns that perpetuate women's inferiority and impede their access to property and inheritance;**

(c) **To ensure that all potential beneficiaries of war reparation, in particular widows and women victims of conflict-related sexual violence, are adequately compensated without further delay.**

Elderly women and women with disabilities

38. The Committee notes with concern that there is a lack of information on the situation of elderly women and women with disabilities who suffer multiple forms

of discrimination and are less likely to have access to basic services, including education, employment and health care.

39. **The Committee recommends that the State party adopt special policy measures and programmes to address the particular needs of elderly women, and girls and women with disabilities, ensuring their social protection and access to education, health care, rehabilitation and employment opportunities.**

Marriage and family relations

40. The Committee reiterates its concern that under the Child Rights Act the minimum age for marriage is 18 years, while under the Registration of Customary Marriages and Divorce Act child marriage is allowed with parental consent. It is also concerned that under customary law parental consent to marriage is always required for females, while it can be dispensed with for males. The Committee is further concerned about the prevalence of polygamous marriages permitted under customary law and the Mohammedan Marriage Act and that property is distributed among the surviving widows of the deceased polygamous husband in proportion to the length of their marriage. It is further concerned at delays in adopting the matrimonial causes bill and at the lack of registration of customary marriages.

41. **In line with its general recommendations No. 21 on equality in marriage and family relations and No. 29 on the economic consequences of marriage, family relations and their dissolution, the Committee recommends that the State party accelerate its legal reform of marriage and family relations and eliminate all discriminatory provisions in customary law and in the Mohammedan Marriage Act, particularly those concerning marriage, divorce and inheritance. It also recommends that the State party expedite the adoption of the matrimonial causes bill and ensure that it covers all types of marriages, including customary marriages, and guarantees equal rights in marriage and in the distribution of property following divorce. Lastly, the Committee recommends that the State party systematically register customary marriages.**

Data collection and analysis

42. The Committee notes with concern the general lack of updated sex-disaggregated data. It recalls that data disaggregated by sex, age and geographical location are necessary for an accurate assessment of the situation of all women, for the development of informed and targeted policymaking and for the systematic monitoring and evaluation of progress achieved towards the realization of women's substantive equality in all areas covered by the Convention.

43. **The Committee calls upon the State party to enhance the collection, analysis and dissemination of comprehensive data disaggregated by sex, age and geographical location, and the use of measurable indicators to assess trends in the situation of women and progress towards the realization of substantive equality of women in all areas covered by the Convention.**

Optional Protocol and amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention

44. **The Committee encourages the State party to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention and to accept, as soon as possible, the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention concerning the meeting time of the Committee.**

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

45. **The Committee calls upon the State party to use the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in its efforts to implement the provisions of the Convention.**

Dissemination

46. **The Committee recalls the obligation of the State party to systematically and continuously implement the provisions of the Convention. It urges the State party to give priority attention to the implementation of the present concluding observations and recommendations between now and the submission of the next periodic report. The Committee therefore requests that the present concluding observations be disseminated in a timely manner to the relevant State institutions at all levels (national, provincial, local), in particular to the Government, the ministries, Parliament and the judiciary, to enable their full implementation. It encourages the State party to collaborate with all stakeholders concerned, such as employers' associations, trade unions, human rights and women's organizations, universities, research institutions and the media. It further recommends that its concluding observations be disseminated in an appropriate form at the local community level, so as to enable their implementation. In addition, the Committee requests the State party to continue to disseminate the Convention, the Optional Protocol thereto and relevant jurisprudence, as well as the Committee's general recommendations, to all stakeholders.**

Technical assistance

47. **The Committee recommends that the State party consider seeking international assistance and avail itself of technical assistance in the development and implementation of a comprehensive programme aimed at the implementation of the above recommendations and the Convention as a whole. The Committee also calls upon the State party to continue its cooperation with specialized agencies and programmes of the United Nations system.**

Ratification of other treaties

48. The Committee notes that the adherence of the State party to the nine major international human rights instruments[1] would enhance the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms in all aspects of life. The Committee therefore encourages the State party to consider ratifying the treaties to which it is not yet a party, namely the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

[1] The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Follow-up to the concluding observations

49. **The Committee requests the State party to provide, within two years, written information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 11, and 33 (a), (b), (c) and (d) above.**

Preparation of the next report

50. **The Committee invites the State party to submit its seventh periodic report in February 2018.**

51. **The Committee requests the State party to follow the harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties, including guidelines on a common core document and treaty-specific documents (HRI/MC/2006/3 and Corr.1).**